A NEW YEAR.

JACK HIGGINS'S peculiarity was that he was always surrounded with babies. Not that this is a disagreeable peculiarity, provided the babies are clean, will sit still on the floor, not cry for gingerbread, or entertain you by rolling from the top to the bottom of the back-stairs every hour or so, after the manner of infants generally.

There are children in story-books—model children in neat little bonnets, driving neat little hoops about a neat little flower-garden; children various in size, but alike in the grandeur of their moral qualities, who keep straight in the path, and never harm the flowers or tear their pinafores, growing "small by degrees and beautifully less," till they end in the arms of an enraptured nurse, holding a bundle of blankets with a baby inside, which appears to give the world no more trouble than a doll would under the same circumstances.

It is very pleasant to read such books. It has a fine effect on persons of a misanthropic turn of mind: your sympathies are so suddenly enlarged; you manifest such a pious devotion to the "angel visitors;" you grow so eloquent over the "Lights of a Household;" you have vague ideas of dispensing with kerosene altogether. In this state of mind you visit your married sister, or, like Mrs. Boffin, set out on a voyage of discovery for an orphan. The orphan adopted, or the period of service, as your sister's nursery-maid, brought to an end, your dream changes. The neat little garden, and the orderly procession driving orderly hoops through it, vanish from your mind's eye: your angels droop and lose their wings; kerosene is reinstated; you yourself show decided monastic tendencies; you have become sadder if not wiser in this world's experience. You have at last found out the real child who keeps you in all varieties of temperature; who takes you from the tropics to the polar regions without the least time for consideration; who chokes you with caresses one minute, and has a fit of sulks the next; who cries on all occasions when he ought not, and is sure to laugh when he ought to cry; who powders his face with the contents of your preserve-jars; who is always sick when you have company; who opens all your drawers, and builds a bonfire of your laces; who makes boats of your party slippers to sail in the wash-tub; who has such great blue eyes, and is so sorry for it all, that ten to one you take him up and kiss him, forgetting the switch you cut so carefully before you came up stairs. Decidedly of the earth, earthy. You own that for the rest of your lifetime, and cherish a secret grudge against the picture-book.

To which of the two species *Infanta* the little Higginses belonged I leave you to determine. Certain it is that their father was very well content with them, if one might judge from appearances. When he went to church there was a child led by each hand, two or three tugging at his long butternut coat, and an unknown quantity, whose devotional powers had not yet matured, crying for him on the door-steps. While he dozed they played hide-and-seek about the pew, his presence always represented to the congregation by the thumping of many pairs of juvenile boots, and the overturning of many crickets in the gallery. When he went to work innumerable little foot-tracks followed in the wake of his ponderous boots. If any one sent for Jack to put up a stove, two or three diminutive Jacks were adorning the parlor carpet, and turning to a surprising black color from creeping into the chimney. If a well was to be cleared, "the little fellars" stood agape and aghast by its mouth, sure to break into a simultaneous yell as their father descended into the water. And when he returned home at night the whole colony swarmed out to meet him, sprinkled along the road at intervals for half a mile.

He had finished his work early one December day, and was spending the afternoon playing with his children in order to secure a little variety. They had converted him into a telegraph post; twine wires entangled him from head to foot, and messages flew from finger to finger, and from button to button. He was smiling good-naturedly down upon the excited operators, pleased in his rough way to see their curls turn into gold in the afternoon sunlight; his wife was busied about the kitchen.

"Give the children a tarnal good supper, Mollie," he said. "New-Year's eve don't come more nor once a year."

"Jack!" said Mrs. Higgins, severely.

Jack was well aware that his wife objected to his use of adjectives; so he sent a furious dispatch from his right-hand coat-pocket to the strap of his boot, and then, looking out of the window, began to whistle.

There had been a thaw for several days past, and the snow was melting on the fields; the broad, warm sunlight caught the patches of grass till they grew faintly green; odors of spring were in the air, and the very drifts under the walls, which melted in such crystal lights, told a story of violets and mosses hidden somewhere underneath. Beyond, over the slope, the ocean met the sky—a thousand little waves breaking the shadows of clouds that hung and trembled in the light. The wind, too, which came up from the beach was low and sweet as a lullaby.

Perhaps the picture had its vague influence over the man—enough to put a homely content into the tune he whistled. It was a pretty good sort of world after all, and it wasn't as bad a thing to work for one's daily bread as it might be—looking over, naturally enough, to his neighbor's windows.

It was a pleasant place, the one just opposite, much larger than his own, though not very large: the house was white, and the green of the blinds always fresh. There was a shady parlor and a sunny back-door—traces of many flowers in the summer, and a dead vine about the porch. While he was watching it lazily through the smoke of

his pipe he saw Miss Harriet Locke come out into the yard. She had on her hood, and a little shawl over her shoulders. Some of Jane's milk-pans needed to be looked after; she hung a few laces too on the line to dry, and then went into the shed to feed the chickens. Looking over she saw Jack's ruddy face at the window, and the children, like so many cartes de visite of their father, staring each through a separate pane of glass. She nodded kindly enough, but did not smile. Presently Jack stopped his tune with a sudden quaver on its highest note.

"I'll be derned ef she ain't pokin' that 'ere wood about!"

"John Higgins!" said his wife, with an admonitory tap of the spoon with which she stirred her dough-nuts. But Jack was totally oblivious both of wife and spoon, for Miss Harriet Locke was beckoning to him to come over. Snapping the telegraph wires like a modern Samson, he seized his hat and went out of the door, the astonished corporation, enraged at this unexpected turn of affairs, shouting vociferously after him.

"Good-afternoon, Miss Harrit."

She was eying the well-piled wood, but turned as he came up, her face a little flushed and her voice unnecessarily sharp.

"Good-afternoon, Jack. You piled this wood?"

"Yes, marm, every stick on't with my own hands—finished chuck on twelve o'clock, and there ain't a better piled cord o' wood in town, I'll warrant."

"It is very well piled," said Miss Harriet; "but what possessed you to put it in this shed? It never goes here."

"That's where Miss Cynthy told me, marm; says she, 'Pile it in the south shed, Jack,' and so in course I did."

"Miss Cynthia told you, did she?" Miss Harriet spoke, quickly.

"You ken ask her yourself," replied Jack, doggedly.

"You knew that wasn't the place, Jack."

"I only obeyed orders, Miss Harrit, and ef you ain't suited I'm sorry for't."

Jack was turning away as if he supposed the conference to be at an end. Harriet Locke was not often forgetful of her dignity with her inferiors, and, repressing a sudden impulse to say that her orders were as good as her sister's, she called him back in a softer tone.

"It's no matter, Jack, if you were told to put it here; I only wanted to ask. How are the children?" putting her hand down on the tangled curls of the one nearest to her.

"Smart as a button," returned Jack, grinning broadly; "hain't none on 'em ben sick an hour sence we driv off the last o' the measles. You would split your sides laughin', Miss Harrit, to see them little fellars eat! Sometimes I be put to't at a dollar a day to keep 'em in victuals; there's no keepin' 'count of the potatoes and beans and fried puddin', and, I swanney! their mother does give 'em such dinners Sundays, there's no keepin' of 'em awake in meetin' no way."

Miss Harriet smiled, and looking round upon the circle of wide-open mouths, appeared much impressed by Jack's statement.

"Then there's Tim into the bargain," continued Jack, thoughtfully; "he's most as big as I be a'ready; he's a great 'un for the gals, Tim is, jes' as like to me, when I was a young fellar, as two peas in a pod."

Miss Harriet did not feel called upon to make any reply, and Jack proceeded.

"I've took half-holiday seein' to-morrow's New Year; hain't took none afore sence Thanksgiving; worked all Christmas, put her through on them kindlin's o' yourn. Mother she's ben cookin' up all day fur the children; she'll beat herself holler workin' for 'em, that woman will—holler as a bad nut."

"You enjoy your holidays, don't you, Jack?" her voice full of some vague regret.

"Wa'al, it's my 'pinion on that pint, he'd be a tough-hearted chap that didn't, all cozyin' up to the fire, and the children playin' round, and—I reckon I do!"

Something in the expression that spread itself over Jack's broad, good-natured face caused Harriet Locke's smile to fade, unconsciously to herself perhaps.

"Make the most of them, Jack," she said, quite gravely, turning away to throw a handful of corn among the hens. Jack took this as a sign that the conversation was at an end, and gathered up his flock for departure.

"Drop in and see us ef 'tain't too much trouble, do, Miss Harrit; we allers like to see folks on a holiday."

"Thank you," she said, kindly; but she did not promise to come.

"Growin' cooler; goin' to be a blow to-night, sure," persisted Jack, looking toward the sea. But receiving some very laconic answer, he touched his hat respectfully and walked away.

Harriet Locke leaned against the wood-pile, and watched him, hardly knowing why. Something in his hearty, happy laugh and the kisses of his children hurt her. She wished to get away from it, she shrank from looking upon the joy of his simple home. If she knew why this was, she did not own the reason to herself. She caught up a long sigh impatiently, and, turning round, faced the fresh breeze from the water. She drank it in with quick, sharp breathing, it was so cool, so pure and passionless; she longed thirstily to take it into her heart, she cried for its soothing. But something prevented this; it only turned to fever in her blood. Her eyes looking over to the sea, sought there, too, something which she did not find. A silence brooded over the fields; the beach stretched out lazily in the sun white and torpid; the warm, golden waves which broke upon it were lost in a calm of purple distance. The breathless sky, the very lull of the sleepy wind maddened her. She looked young as she stood there—younger by ten years than she was. Her face, even in its

customary thin and sallow look, gave traces of former beauty, and just then she formed a pleasant picture. Her hair, which the years had not robbed of its soft, golden color, fell about her face, the curls of a past fashion to be sure, but suited to her; all that kept the memories of a lost youth was suited to her, the warm color flushing her cheeks, and the light in her eyes alike. In one such moment you would have understood her, when weeks of ordinary acquaintance might only have puzzled you.

For some reason the insight she had just had into the humble home of her workman staid by her. These people enjoyed their holidays so; and she as well as they had once loved to welcome the New Year. They cared so much for each other—why, Jack was really proud of his uncouth children. Well, why should he not be? They were his own, they climbed upon his knees and played about his sunny kitchen: he was their father, and they loved him. That afternoon, when she had spoken to the little girl and touched its forehead, the child shrank away. Probably her hand was cold—she had no gloves. But somehow she could not forget it: who loved her? who cared to watch for her and kiss her? Why did she chill all the happy, young life about her; why did all alike turn from her? She might have answered her own questions; but like many another she would not. The thought, turning itself in her mind, rankled bitterly. Happy homes and merry holidays were for others—God had decreed that there should be none for her. She clasped her hands with an impatient gesture as if she would throw off this burden of life—this weary, pitiless burden! It grew so heavy; how could she bear it?

"Harriet!" called a voice from the house. She turned quickly, dropping her hands.

"Harriet, I'm afraid you'll take cold."

The tones—neither gentle nor unkind—jarred just then. She made no reply, and turned her face again toward the sea. A sister? Why, yes; of course she had a sister. And a home? Better than nothing, perhaps, but not much to be thankful for. She would have been surprised to be told otherwise. The discontent darkened bitterly on her face. The wind blowing up from the sea chilled her: she shivered, and, drawing her shawl about her shoulders, turned to go into the house.

The brightness on her cheeks and eyes had not faded when she opened the sitting-room door. Her sister, sitting quietly at her knitting, looked up when she came in and looked surprised.

"You don't seem much as if you'd taken cold—that's a fact," she said; "but I'm afraid you have, and we shall have you down sick tomorrow."

"I rather think I know how to take care of myself; and if I am sick, I promise not to trouble you to take care of me," replied Harriet, taking a seat by the fire. Cynthia made no reply, and they rocked in silence, watching the sluggish smoke that curled up the chimney.

"I don't see," began the younger sister at last, "what you had that wood put in the south shed for. You know it isn't half as dry, and we never have it there."

Cynthia made some quiet reply; she was always the last to lose her good temper. But Harriet was dissatisfied with her reasons, and still more with her manner: its contrast to her own was not pleasant.

"It would be supposed that I should *sometimes* be consulted in regard to household affairs, and that *every* order I may choose to give would not be so religiously disregarded," she said, heroically.

"You are at perfect liberty to do as you like," returned Cynthia, in her indifferent way. "You know very well that you never *did* know how to take care of a house; and if you're not satisfied with my management, I don't see as it can be helped."

"This reminds me of a child's book I once read about two good little sisters who loved each other—this is an affectionate world!" said Harriet, with a bitter laugh.

Cynthia stooped to pick up her ball.

"Especially if one isn't blessed with a temper," continued her sister, for want of a better retort.

Cynthia took up a book.

Harriet tapped the floor nervously with her foot and compressed her lips—then she also was silent. Not that it made any difference to her whether the wood was in the south shed or the North Pole. Of course it didn't; it was the principle she objected to. Cynthia always would have her own way, and she was tired of being ordered round like a girl and— How far the list of grievances might have gone on I can not say if it had not been interrupted by Cynthia's leaving the room. Just at that moment a large brand rolled down upon the hearth, and there being no one else to attend to it, Harriet was obliged to devote all her energies to the rebuilding of the fire—and her meditations about the wood-shed were cut short.

Perhaps you smile that I tell you of such a child's quarrel between two women past the prime of life—sensible, kind-hearted women, who read together daily at the same altar the Book, out of which they had learned together as little children to be "kindly affectioned"—women who, in a world of life and love, were left alone to be helpers each to the other—who bore in secret many burdens that might have been tenderly shared; whose hearts, aching with unshed tears, should have yearned one to another—who looked forward to an old age whose weakness and loneliness would meet them both together—who would pass on, side by side, to the death which it brought at last. No, you do not smile—it saddens you as it does me.

Cynthia came back presently with her work and sat down again. She did not notice her sister or speak. It was no intentional ill-humor, as Harriet very naturally supposed. The shade of some sad thought was on her face; and

who that has Cynthia Locke's reticent nature does not know how a cloud no bigger than a man's hand will grow and darken till it closes on the horizon and shuts out all sight of the world beyond it?

She was overlooking a box of bright-colored ribbons, pretty bits of girl's finery, many of them little worn and fresh as if some happy young fingers had taken them off but yesterday and laid them away. Cynthia took them up, one by one, passing her thin hands tenderly over each, lingering to fold and unfold, and fold again, some quaint, soft pattern. Harriet watched her with an idle curiosity. Her eye was caught by the contrast of the gay colors against her sister's black dress—Cynthia always wore black. There was something pitiful in it. So there was, too, in the old, pale face with its compressed lips, in the dreariness of the inexpectant eyes, and the gray of the hair that had been once so dark.

"What *are* you doing?" she said, at length, as Cynthia began to rip apart some bows of bright blue ribbon.

"I am going to give this to Jane for a bonnet trimming; she needs one, and I suppose it is foolish to buy when this is lying useless."

"Of course it is. I wonder you haven't used them before."

Harriet had not heard the faltering in her sister's voice; she did not see how many times she laid down her scissors, how she turned away, her whole face quivering, nor how the quiet tears stood in her eyes and dropped upon her work. If she had, would she have understood? Would she not have wondered pettishly what Cynthia *was* crying about? It may be so. She did not know of all the young, bright memories bound up in those pretty trifles; she did not think what a story they each told to the desolate woman. Woman-like, the very finery she had worn in the days of her joy had grown sacred. Such little—such very little things! Only a withered flower that hands long cold had placed in the girl's bright hair—only a bit of ribbon whose tint against the girl's cheek had pleased the eyes long dim! Do you wonder at this pain? I think it no irreverence to believe it is not forgotten or uncomforted in heaven.

Harriet turned away to look out of the window; she had meant nothing unkind, and forgot her words with their utterance. Cynthia worked on in silence, unthinking that others too might suffer, that to each some burden falls—that her younger sister might be longing for gentle words which she could speak.

I know I tell you of a truthful experience. That these two women should sit and watch the dreary afternoon together, see the long shadows of the evening creeping up the hills, and bear the darkness that fell into the heart of each, as far apart as if a world had sundered them, is no uncommon story.

The day was full of memories that they might have shared. Many pleasant holidays had brought them as children round this same fireside. Many nights they had watched the old year out, and dreamed their girls' dreams together. Many voices long passed into silence had mingled cheerily with their own in this same old room. It was bright to-night with almost forgotten pictures—one upon another, brightening and fading—one upon another, each with its own sad or joyful story. So long ago it had been a happy room, before the mother's step about the house was hushed or the father's hair was silvered. So long ago the old man had given them his last blessing, and they had carried him too to his rest. So many years they had sat here in the twilight—they two alone. So they sat together now—they two alone.

Oh these dead and dying years! With what a cry do we call them back! what pleading arms do we stretch out to them! So full they are of all we hold dearest and brightest; so hard it is to let them go; so weakly we sit and shiver to hear the merry midnight bells, to see the cold light creeping up the hills, to feel the sure coming of a new year for which we have no welcome.

Harriet Locke, in the midst of her bitter musings, felt at last the long shadow of a leafless tree upon her forehead, and glad, with an impatient desire for change, to know that the afternoon was passing, rose to order tea.

"Supper gives one something to think about, at any rate," she said to her sister.

"It makes no difference that I know of," replied Cynthia, abstractedly.

Harriet shrugged her shoulders and went to call Jane. Passing into the kitchen she found it empty. She called, but the handmaiden was not. Another grievance. Why couldn't servants always "stay put" instead of making you race the house over after them? Miss Harriet, however, did not race the house over, but finding the kitchen fire warm and inviting preferred to stand and meditate over the coals. While thus employed she heard a familiar voice through the half-open door.

"Law, Tim! how can you now?"

Looking out of the window, Jane and the susceptible Tim appeared tête-à-tête upon the door-steps. The young lady, in lieu of a handkerchief, was twisting her dish-towel bashfully, and her chubby hands, warm and pink from their immersion in the suds, looked to Tim's eyes as fair, perhaps, as if they were small and white, and bore the flash of diamonds.

They formed a pretty picture—Tim's hearty farmer's face all aglow, and the girl's honest eyes so full of the old story.

A kindlier heart than Harriet Locke's was just then would have warmed at it.

"You know," said Jane, coquettishly, "you like Betsey Hodges a heap better nor me."

"Jerusalem! Jenny, I'll be blessed if I do! I dished her long ago."

Tim's cavalierly manner could not fail of conviction. He may also have confirmed it by some conclusive method entirely satisfactory to

the young lady; for when she came in at her mistress's call her pretty round cheeks were burning, and her eyes dropped shyly on the ground.

"Jane, what have you been about? I want you to get supper now immediately, and not idle any longer."

Harriet's heart smote her for this petty impatience as she turned away. She could not help thinking that Cynthia would not have done thus. She would only have smiled—her sad smile—and spoken to the girl quite kindly. Ah! but it was not with Cynthia as with her.

The cloud on her face darkened as she came back and began to pace the room impatiently. This little thing had jarred so—that the very servant in her kitchen should be blessed—that every where she turned on this, to her, most bitter night, this joy and love with which the world was full should sting her! You blame her. Yet judge her not harshly; for the dark pages of her experience were written with no softening lines. Many tears unshed will freeze at the heart; and who that feels the chill knows of them?

Jane brought in the tea-things at last, her good-natured face grown quite pretty with her bit of a dream, which was as sweet to her as it had been once to the two women who sat and watched her silently.

"Is that all, Miss Cynthia?" fingering a little cornelian ring furtively.

"Yes, except the toast."

"That's most ready. I'm going to butter it with Betsey Hodges—I mean with the new butter, and then I'll bring it."

"Very well, you may go, Jane."

Jane went, blushing scarlet. Cynthia smiled; Harriet sipped her tea, and said nothing. It was yet very early, but Harriet had wanted light, and the room was warm and pleasant, with its cozy table spread for two, and the crackling of the fire. It might have been home-like if either of them had chosen to have it so. The burden of the gloomy and silent meal grew too heavy at last. Harriet pushed back her chair impatiently.

"You are very entertaining to-night, Cynthia."

"So are you."

"I do declare one might as well be without a sister!"

"That's a rule that works both ways," replied Cynthia, with unwonted temper and an unusual color flushing her pale cheek. Both rose then, and went each her own way. It was perfectly natural to Cynthia to go up stairs and lock herself in alone. It was as natural for Harriet, as being the younger and more adventurous, to throw on her cloak and hood, shut the street door hard, and start off for a walk in the cold, clear sunset.

She turned her face seaward, over fields where the snow had hardened under the evening wind, and the patches of grass, losing all their boast of pallid green, had frozen crisp and sere; over frosty walls, which she climbed even yet with some of the nimbleness of her younger years; through little well-worn foot-paths half hidden by the shallow snow, and down at last upon the beach, which stretched out, a dull expanse of marbled pavement, under her feet.

Passing some chalky rocks which lay high upon the shore out of reach of the tide, and covered with some scant field-growth that had found its way to them, she stopped suddenly. Not that the rocks were picturesque, or that any fantastic shape was there to catch her eye. It was simply an old memory which, coming back, struck her sharply. It was on New Year's eve, and many years ago, that she had come out at this same hour to walk upon the beach, and stopped just here to rest a moment. Far down among the rocks a figure was moving and coming toward her. She had watched it idly as she sat, the sunset light bright on her golden hair and in her eyes. She had watched it wondering as it came nearer; and the stranger—his form in full relief against the sky, his eyes like her own, bright and deep in the light—paused a moment in surprise to see her there, murmured some apology, and with a bow passed on. And as he walked over the fields she had turned to look again.

Her breath grew sharp and quick as she remembered. Better had she gone that night down into the calm wide ocean, and that its waves had caught her away! Compressing her lips sharply, and turning with a quick, nervous walk once more to the sea.

Reaching it at last, she climbed the cliffs that stood low upon the shore, then down their stair-like sides, and out upon a narrow ledge of rock covered with dank barnacles, and jutting into the yellow sand left weed-strewn by the tide. It looked like the ruins of a wharf in the ruin of a sea. She herself did not mar the fancy as she stood upon it, her figure, in its dark cloak, sharp against the glow of the sky; the wind blowing her bright hair—so bright for its old, sad fashion; her face, which the light touched, pale with its wreck of beauty; her thin hands, which had been once young and fair, thrown down and crossed so hopelessly.

There was a strange contradiction in the life this woman had led, but one common as mysterious. Her long-lost youth and beauty had not failed of finding their due of love. There were those who, but for the slow scorn in her face, would have come back gladly to Harriet Locke that night, standing even as she was, such a pitiful shadow of herself, by those desolate waters; who had lived long years homeless for her sake, as she for another's. To her who held the power over so much love and so much misery the one love had been denied, and the one misery decreed.

All the bitterness which had wrung itself into her heart from each one of these deserted years was on her face as, turning, she sat down upon the slippery rock to watch the sea. There was no softening of its hard lines; no lowly trust,

learned from long submission, in her eyes; no tenderness upon her lips. The crown of sorrow, nobly borne, was not there. I think it not strange that she did not wear it, though it would well have graced her brows, and shone with surpassing brightness, as hardly won. Scorned! Did it not take every throb of her heart's life to meet and bear and battle with the galling word? Is any like it? She had needed love and strength these many years to help her face it, and none had come to her.

So I think you would have gone away sorrowful if you had seen her and heard her stifled cry. The night was passionate, glowing, full of gorgeous dreams that brought to her no cool or calm. The wind, catching the roar of breakers on some distant beach, swept by like some grand, triumphal chant; the cliffs towered against the sky—a huge palace, golden in the light, with the dash of sea-birds' wings against its windows, and its arches filled with the music of many tides. Opal tints shifted and paled upon the sea;' the waves broke in tongues of flame; the west beyond, like some gigantic mountain on fire, died royally.

The brightness closed in around the woman sitting so alone—she the only dark or unjoyful thing within it. The smile which chilled her face at the thought faded suddenly. The aching at her heart turned to actual pain; she wrung her hands over it, her face melting and breaking, the great sobs choking her. The old joys and the old pain crowded thickly together, the vague thrill that had crept into that other New-Year's eve so like, so unlike this; a summer filled with fragrance, bright with sunny fields, and roses never so sweet before; a voice and a face that haunted this winter night now as then. A cloud sweeping over the golden harvest hours, silence where had been words that made each day beautiful, and, where a smile had met her, only the coming of autumn, and the green leaves dropping in the forest. She called it all back imperiously. She met it face to face with a certain impatient will to choose the rack since torture was sure. To be left—to be left without one kind word! that he should make her love his plaything, then go out into the world where she was not and forget her. She was not old and faded in those golden days; many another was proud if she but smiled, but *this* one, he alone turned from her. She hated him with bitter hatred, yet for him all life was darkened. She cursed the very splendor of this princely night for its memories of the one year standing alone in all her life into which he had come. Yet because of him she would have turned even then to the bright waters, and sought the death they would give her as gladly as a weary child its rest.

No thought of home, of any other love of sister or friend came to help her. She seemed to herself shut in alone with her bitter fate, alone with this waste of waters. She raised her eyes to look off upon it. The gold of the waves had dimmed to amber, and the amber had dulled to dreary gray. A cloud had closed down heavily upon the brightness of the sky; a long line of stormy red in the west came sharp against it; the palace front had become a mass of frowning rock; gulls shrieked and wheeled in the air above her; some dark uncanny object rose and fell upon the waves quite near her; it was a piece of an old wreck. It came to her as an ill omen as she strained her eyes to watch it through the gloom. She shivered, and, drawing her cloak about her, rose to go home.

But what was that? Why did the black waves tower and break so? Where was the weed-strewn beach? What meant this water surging past her? How came that sound of breakers against the cliffs behind?

The tide up and she had not known it! How long had it dashed through the cove beyond? Standing upon the slippery ledge, the wind breaking in sharp gusts about her, she tried to pierce the dusk. Sea and sky and cliff were one; dull dead gray, and the faster dash of waves; that was all.

Harriet Locke was not a timid woman, but her face paled as she retraced her steps over the rock, now wet with the spray.

Reaching its abrupt end at last she stopped.

Mad waves hurrying through, breaking at her feet, lashing the rocks! The cliffs frowning across, the sky dark above!

To breast the torrent was certain death, and to stay— She tried to test the depth of the water, but fell back clinging on the rock; in another moment she would have been its plaything.

She took the truth in clearly. Sitting down quietly upon the rock, to keep the better hold upon its slippery surface, she looked about her. A certain calm comes to natures like hers in danger, which is wonderful for strength and beauty. All the weakness and petty impatience and uncontrollable nerve that makes up the everyday woman passes out of sight as if it had never been. A power is there of which you have not dreamed. You thought hers to be the merest womanly soul; it becomes suddenly that of hero.

Harriet Locke watched the curling line that rose and broke and fell about her. She put her hand into the water and felt its chill; she quivered under the wind that came with a shriek over leagues and leagues of ocean waste to blow upon her; she looked out to the dead black distance where to-morrow's tide would go surging back; she looked upon the shore and knew that it tossed her call away, and that none could hear it.

Then she gathered her cloak about her and sat quite still.

I know that it is one thing to weary of life and another to give it up when it is asked for; that it is an easy thing to look on death from afar, and quite another to face it in some sharp and sudden terror.

Yet I speak truly when I tell you that in that first still moment Harriet Locke was conscious

of nothing but a wild flash of joy. Years of captivity—and the prison-doors were opened! Years of twilight weeping—now no more tears or sighing! Scorned and deserted years. Now the triumph of a life bound by no shackles of earth! Now the rest of a life which should bring her home and love!

But something catching her eye struck sharply against this dream and it faded. It was a little thing; many another time she would not have noticed it; only an hour before she had turned away from it; it had then no voice for her, it told no softening story.

It was a light in her own home—in Cynthia's room. Past the turn of the cliff, over the dark fields and through the branches of the old familiar garden trees she saw it quite plainly. Cynthia's room! her own room too. How many years they had shared it, since the days when it held a trundle-bed, and two children slept in each other's arms, their faces rosy in the fire-light! How many, many years! They were so old now, and the house had never held them one night apart. Yes, there was one, Harriet had almost forgotten it. A dark, stormy night, and over the telegraph wires had flashed some sudden message to Cynthia. She did not come to bed that night; they had heard the front-door shut, and knew that she had gone away alone to the sea. She had waked many times in the night and had not found her, but when the morning came Cynthia was lying upon the bed beside her, dressed as she had been the day before, her eyes closed, her hands quite still upon her breast, her tangled hair all wet, as if with the spray of midnight waves.

Poor Cynthia! Since then she had been so changed. She would have been such a happy bride, and there was nothing left to her but widowhood. She had had a hard life—what wonder she grew forgetful even of her sister? What wonder when that sister would not be to her a comforter?

How fast the pictures crowded up! With what shame of herself she saw them! Years of petty jars and strifes, so full of her own thoughtless and bitter words—the distance growing and greatening between them, when they might have been so much each to the other: their home but something endured, not loved—its sweet fire-side lights, that might have gladdened many another, all darkened!

These memories, one upon another, came in the flash of a moment: her ear never once lost the thunder of the surge; her eye marked every inch of water that rose against the rock. The foam of each tossing wave seemed to catch that light in the window; how it glowed and brightened! What a cheery look of home and love it had! And the waves that grew deeper and higher were very cold.

Cynthia was in her room now; her heart so lonely on this New-Year's eve, and no sister was there to cheer and kiss her. None would ever be. None would ever go back to her and sob upon her neck, and hold her closely, weeping out the penitent love of so many, many years.

Perhaps Cynthia thought of her now—perhaps her face was pale with the unkindness of this bitter afternoon—perhaps she knelt and prayed alone. So she would kneel and pray alone to-morrow.

Did she miss her? Did she wonder where she was? Did she care to hear her voice and see her face—her wayward sister, who had loved her when she was a little child? How pleasant the room was looking now! She could almost see it through the white curtain; how cozy and comfortable the fire! how warm the lamp-light upon the old red chairs and on the ivy in the window! How many times she had laughed at that worn furniture, and scolded about those troublesome plants! Now she should never see them again. How gray Cynthia's hair was! how sad her quivering mouth! how thin and old her poor, poor hands!

This desert line of water was very dark, and the great black waves stretched out such fearful arms. How that ominous wreck rose and fell—rose and fell! Why *would* no one hear her call? If Cynthia could catch its faintest echo! If she only knew!

A wave swept across her, chilling her hands that clung so helplessly to the slimy weeds.

One more cry! With what a shriek the wind caught it away! How bright the light in the old room! how it moved! yes—some one—Cynthia raised the curtain; she looked out upon this tossing sea, where this ruined wood eyed her like an evil thing. A wreck! What would she be to-morrow? Was it there only to torture her? Would she and it together float in the surge, and catch the twining of the wet weeds all night? A dash of surf upon her face took her breath sharply; a gull whirred by her, and away, shrieking into the night.

The light and the figure at the window were gone—it was passing down stairs—it was bright again in the sitting-room, then in the kitchen. Cynthia had missed her.

Another storm of surf—the weeds were slipping from her frozen hands. It was too late—too late! Cynthia would not find her; she must go and never tell her—never kiss her! Death! it was so cold and dark! Who would help her? There was an old promise; she remembered it with a cry as her hold loosened from the rock: "When thou passest through the waters." He who spoke it would be with her; for she had not thought to die alone. She called Him feebly. There was a thundering of surges in her ears—home and Cynthia. Then the ruin of a wharf and the ruin of a sea were gone. The tide rolling up smoothly swept like a song of evil triumph against the cliffs. Sky and wind and a wilderness of waves; the wreck among the rocks that rose and fell; the lowering and chill of a winter's storm; and that was all.

Across the fields and through the garden trees the light still glimmered faintly, and the rain

beat upon the old home-roof. Cynthia Locke went up stairs that night and into her room, with something sadder than usual in the slow and feeble step which had been hers for many years. She closed and locked her door, drew a chair up to the fire and sat down, leaning her head upon her hand very, very wearily.

There was something appealing in the picture, in the gray hair brushed back under its black cap, in the sharp angles of her face—an old woman's face, though she was but forty-three; in the solitude of her eyes—you might meet such eyes upon a desert; in the hand with its one dulled ring, and in the very attitude of her quiet figure.

In Cynthia Locke's nature grief, like love, endured to the end. It was no less to her now than it had been long years ago, when it had struck suddenly upon the sunlight of her girlhood, a heavy cloud and full of storms. Not less but more. Whatever its sealed story, which none knew or would ever know, the burden borne so patiently was a heavy one. I think you will say that. I think you would have longed to give her that silent sympathy which alone she would receive; to speak all words tenderly to her, if so you might help her, remembering Him from whom no mourner ever turned away uncomforted.

Yet her sorrow had its blessings as its pain. Many gifts through suffering might have been hers. Gifts of tender help and love. Hearts which groped in darkness, to whom she should bring light; hearts like her own perishing in a dry and thirsty land, to whom she should send the refreshing of a new life; wayward and wandering hearts who needed but the gentleness of such a touch as hers.

So I think her sister was not all to blame in their slow estrangement. Harriet, like many another with her lot to bear, was perverse and petulant and thoughtless. But the long disappointment of years had turned acrid in her heart. There were no softening memories in it, no sense of unseen help, no hopes for a future into which death could not enter. Only the sense of a forsaken eternity, and the sting of tortured pride. She did not suffer as much as her sister; her heart in its self-scorn found yet many joys on earth that Cynthia could not share; she did not suffer as much, but more hopelessly, and therefore far more bitterly. Might not Cynthia have done more than bear her pettish vagaries, and keep silent in all these little jars of their everyday life? *She* had strength that Harriet knew not of. She should, I think, have borne most tenderly with her; she should have taken this her younger sister by the hand, and led her gently over all rough places and thorny roads. And to bring that stormy life at last into the calm of green fields and chastened sunlight would have been indeed a jewel in her crown.

Some vague thought of this crossed Cynthia's mind as she sat watching the fire. But it was very vague, and, scarcely taking form, faded away before the shadow that lay so heavily upon her own heart.

The night was voiceful for her as for her sister. The first day of the New Year! It was to have been her marriage day. And, miles away, there was a lonely grave over which the evening wind was wailing. It was nearer to her heart to-night than any thing else in all the world.

She rose at last, and, unlocking one of her drawers, took therefrom a box and laid it upon the table. She stopped before she opened it, passing her fingers over some delicate white flowers on its cover with a feeble, trembling motion, like the hands guided by blind eyes.

She took the things out one by one, her face bowed over them, her fingers touching them reverently. Some old letters, yellow and faded, and blurred with many tears; the faint perfume of some withered flowers, which kept the semblance of a wreath, as do those we place upon a grave when they are soaked with autumn rains. A gift or two that would please a girl's fancy, and a lock of clinging hair. Under these the folds of a silken dress, soft and white; a veil which fell out over Cynthia's fingers as she touched it, and floated down to the ground like a thing of life; dainty slippers, which might have kept time themselves to some merry music; and a pair of soft gloves—so soft a little hand within them would hardly have felt their touch. All once of purest white; now faintly yellow. Very faintly, however, for Time had dealt kindly with them: the sad, pale tint was only sad enough and pale enough to touch them with a blessing beautiful for sacredness.

Cynthia laid them all out upon her lap, took them up one by one, and laid them down again. None of them had been worn, nor would be. Made ready for a day which had never come, they were folded away with all their happy dreamings; turned into the dark like a mute, white face in waiting. As if the girl had laid them away trustfully, still looking for that day which never came.

What was in Cynthia Locke's soul this night I can not tell you. Far be it from me, for it is holy ground. God only, who had smitten her, knew or shall ever know the darkness of its waste places. She trod them alone with Him.

Her face, when she rose at last to fold and lay away the bridal dress, spoke the peace of a heart to which He had indeed been near. No selfish grieving could be where He had been. All homely joys and loves and common duties grew suddenly beautiful for His sake. It had been often so before, but never as now. She thought she would like to talk with her sister a while—where was Harriet? It was some time since she had seen her; she would go down stairs and hunt her up. She must have been lonely all this evening; she must be often lonely. Some regret was on her face just then, some pang at her heart.

So often do we face a duty just as its call has ceased; so often we have but learned to miss a blessing, and it is gone from us.

Cynthia took up her lamp and went down stairs. She opened the sitting-room door, and spoke, her voice quite gentle: "Haven't you been—"

But there she stopped, for the room was empty. Harriet's low rocking-chair stood before the fire as she had left it. Some gust sweeping in at the open door stirred it; while she looked it rocked slowly back and forth. The embers were smouldering on the hearth, the windows rattled in the storm, and still as she stood listening that blank, bare chair rocked slowly.

A vague chill crept into Cynthia's heart; she shivered and turned to go out. Then she came back, put her foot upon the chair, and stopped it with some impatience. Turning as she closed the door a second time, she looked back—it still was rocking slowly.

She crossed the entry with a bit of self-contempt in her smile; Harriet was of course in the kitchen. There was some confusion there as she turned the handle. Jane was sitting by the stove, her cheeks the color of its coals, knitting as demurely as if she had done nothing else throughout the evening. Some scuffling was on the door-steps, however, and the girl began to push away an empty chair that had stood quite near her own.

For some reason this reminded Cynthia of an expression she caught on Harriet's face that evening at supper-time. How young and pretty she had looked to-night! How feverish that light in her eyes! What ailed her? She wished she had asked.

"Has Miss Harriet been here, Jane?"

"No, mum, she hain't. I heern the front door shut long since."

"She didn't come this way then?" going to the window in an anxious way.

"No, mum—indeed, mum, she didn't. You needn't look that way for her—I know she ain't there."

Jane's confusion was increasing. At any other time her mistress would have smiled. Now she only left the room quite gravely, and put on her shawl and rubbers to go out. Harriet must be over at Jack's; she would step in and call for her, and they would come home together. There had been none to make her New-Year's eve, and she had gone away to forget it and herself. Poor Harriet!

If you had looked into Jack Higgins's kitchen that night your eye would have been caught by two principal adornments, each of them good in their proper place and quantity, lavished here with wild profusion. I refer to children and dough-nuts. Of which time would fail me to tell you; children upon their father's knee, pulling at their mother's skirts, under the table, on the table, in front of the stove, behind the stove, on the chairs, and on the floor. Dough-nuts in pans, dough-nuts upon plates, dough-nuts cushioning all available seats and paving the floor; dough-nuts in the hands and in the mouths of all the children upon their father's knee, pulling their mother's dress, under the table, on the table, in front of the stove, behind the stove, on the chairs, and on the floor.

To say that Jack was happy would be but a meagre expression. The group did not indeed form an unpleasant picture. The covers of the stove were off, and the light fell warmly on the little brown faces and bright eyes; the mother, too, in her neat, holiday dress, was very fair in her husband's eyes that night.

"I say for't," he remarked, admiringly, "ef you don't look like Mollie Jenkins, fur all the world, I'm beat; jes' the way you was when I come courtin'—'long in hayin' time it was too—eh, Mollie?"

"Don't be foolish, Jack," replied his wife, in a stifled voice, quite smothered by the arms of some affectionate infant, who was employing its time in journeying from her lap to her shoulder and down the back of her chair, returning by a vociferous express to the original station.

"At *any* rate," puffed Jack through his pipe, with the tone of one who has made a point in an argument, "Tim's some on the gals."

"Tim does very well." His mother's one sin was pride in that young gentleman.

"Tim does well enough—all his nonsense you've learned him."

"You can't say I didn't know what I was up to when *I* set up fur a wife," said Jack, with triumph in his eye.

Mrs. Higgins appreciatively fished up an enormous nut from among its fellows and expressed it to her husband. The engineer, apparently feeling no responsibility for freightage, managed to dispose of it on the trip.

"Where is the boy now?"

"Over to Miss Locke's," replied his father.

"Miss Locke's! what does she want of him?"

"Oh, only some little business," said Jack, discreetly. Mrs. Jack looked incredulous; he puffed away in silence.

"It *is* any how," he broke out at last.

"Mercy on us! what a start you give me—is what?"

"This is a slick sort o' home of ourn; ain't it now?"

"Well, if I say it as shouldn't say it, it's happier nor some greater folks'—neighbors too," returned his wife, significantly.

A great disturbance at the door drew the eyes of the whole colony to it just then. It was the son and heir: he stumbled up the steps and stood with the door half open.

"What are you letting in all that draught for, Timothy?"

"Mother, you just hush up, will you?" said the cavalierly Tim. "Can't a gentleman listen on his own threshold when he thinks he hears a noise?"

The argument was unanswerable, and Mrs. Higgins subsided.

"It *is*," said Tim, at length.

"What?"

"Somebody hollerin' down on the beach."

In a moment that gentleman found himself penned in the midst of the whole family with-

out any prospect of egress or ingress. They listened as quietly as possible under the circumstances. They heard it quite plainly above the roar of the surf—a long, sharp cry.

Some one opened the gate and approached the steps. It was Miss Cynthia Locke. She came up to them, the light from the open door falling full on her face.

"Is Miss Harriet here?" speaking hurriedly, with some attempt at a smile.

"No, marm; nor she hain't ben here—not but what we'd be glad to see her and you too, Miss Cynthy."

"She hasn't been here at all?"

"Not anigh the house to-day, no nigher nor the wood-pile in that south shed o' yourn; ain't lost, is she?"

Cynthia Locke's face had paled suddenly. Jack saw it and looked at his wife; his wife looked at him.

"Where *can* she be?" said Miss Cynthia, her voice full of ill-repressed alarm.

"Ain't she to some o' the neighbors, Miss Cynthy?"

"No," shaking her head; she felt very sure of that.

Tim, who had started with a lantern for the beach to discover the cause of the cry they had heard a moment before, turned about before he had crossed the first field, and came back running.

"I declare if a fellar hadn't ought to be blowed for losin' his wits like this. I see Miss Harrit along by sundown goin' off toward the sea, and I never thought on't till this blessed minute."

"Thunder and lightning!" said Jack, looking at Miss Cynthia, "an' that ere hollerin'—"

"A cry? Did you hear a cry, Jack?"

"Thunder and lightning! Miss Cynthy."

Jack could say no more. Cynthia Locke had grasped his arm; but he shook her hand off and strode off with Tim to the beach.

She followed him without a word or cry. Over the fields along the little worn foot-path Harriet had trodden in the sunset light; over the walls she had climbed so nimbly. She stopped a moment to get breath and look about her, when she stood at last upon the beach.

The sky was black above her, the sands black under her feet, the cliffs and sea before her were black. Running her eye along the shore, she caught the gleam of Tim's lantern, and saw the figures of the two men unfastening a boat that lay high upon the sand.

A boat? Where then was Harriet? She looked up to the cliffs; dark and still and empty, they looked down on her; a gull flew screaming from them and past her, almost brushing her cheek. She looked out upon the sea, a line of swelling waves, gray foam, and clouds of spray; the booming of miles of surge along the coast, and the lashing of the swifter storm.

Her face was a shade whiter in the full light of the lantern, her voice sharp.

"Have you seen her?"

"Thought so," said Jack, working on the rope. "Somethin's bobbin' up and down out there. Ain't no misfort'nate love in the case, is there, Miss Cynthy?"

Cynthia was looking at some dark object that rose and fell with the waves; she made no reply.

"Hope Miss Harrit ain't gone and drowned herself," sympathized Jack, pushing off the boat. "This water is a big 'un; ef she's there we'll haul her in, Miss Cynthy. Steady there, Tim!" And with a sweep and a lurch the boat was tossing on the waves.

Cynthia stood upon the rocks, her hands shut one into the other like a vice, her eyes fixed on that other thing—that dark and heavy thing which was tossing on the waves. If she had not believed when she came to the beach that she should find her sister here, scarcely more did she believe it now.

This stretch of fathomless sea, this tide that swept and broke with such a mighty cry, these cruel rocks that tore and tossed the waves—was Harriet *here?* Her face growing grayer and paler as she watched the sea, and the boat that struggled against it stood out against the night like some statue cut in marble. A statue that had been, and would be for years, alone with its own solitude. The boat at length turned, coming swifter with the tide; the light of the lantern caught the green swell of the waves, the splash of foam against the oars, and the forms of the men—one only rowing, the other sitting with his back toward the shore.

The boat struck, and grated at last upon the sand; the two men rose and stepped out silently, something held within their arms. They came and laid it down at Cynthia's feet, quite gently.

"We found her floatin' with a piece of wreck," said Jack, in a hushed voice. But when he looked up into her face he turned away and pulled his hat over his eyes.

Then Cynthia stooped and pushed the hair away from her sister's face—the bright, fair hair that she had so often twined and curled about her finger.

She lay upon the yellow sands, her face still turned to the sea—the face which had been all unkissed this New-Year's eve; her hands, thrown down as they had clutched the drifting wreck, were tangled in the wet and slimy weeds—the poor, thin hands that had once been warm and young. The storm beat upon her; the waves creeping up the beach almost touched her where she lay so quietly, and the wind blew again the bright, fair hair that Cynthia had smoothed away.

They raised her very gently, and the two men carried her up the slope and over the dull, frozen fields.

Turning then into the little yard, up the steps, and into the old home door, slowly—very slowly. Many times had Harriet come up those steps and into that door, with the pattering, impatient feet of a little child whose laugh rang like music all over the silent house—whose pretty dimpled face made all its light. With the happy tread of a girl looking through green vines

and sunlight, who waited for the sounding of a step upon the grass. With the weary feet of a woman who had walked many years alone. Cynthia thought of this as they bore her through the door that swung and creaked upon its hinges to give them entrance.

Past the room where the little tea-table still stood spread for two, where the fire was burned to ashes and the empty chair had ceased to rock. So many times coming in, Harriet had turned to it to warm her hands at the blaze, or take her work at the window. Now she passed it by, and, passing, did not see it. For one alone the table should be spread to-morrow; one only should henceforth sit and work beside the fire.

Up the stairs, and into her own room—the room where she had slept for so many years; where it was fitting they should bring her for this most quiet slumber. The worn furniture was there, the warmth of the home-like fire, and the ivy in the window.

They laid her down upon the bed, her poor white face turned upon the pillow, the wet, wet hair falling over it.

So it had turned many times upon that pillow, her cheeks wet then as now—but not with ocean waves—her hair tossed away from sleepless eyes that watched the long night through.

They laid her down very tenderly, and then the two men went softly out to leave Cynthia Locke alone with her dead.

The doctor coming in at last at Jack's summons found the room bright with fresh fire, and the two women—Cynthia and Jane—hopelessly chafing Harriet's frozen limbs, and trying in vain to bring breath into the cold and lifeless mouth.

Cynthia looked up into his face when he came to the bedside, stooping, with his ear to Harriet's heart and his finger on the pulse—a mute look that was far more piteous than a cry. He did not meet her eye, nor speak. The moments passed like the toll of a bell. Cynthia felt that the light was bright upon the ivy in the window, and upon the bed where it touched such a silent form. She heard the pattering of the winter rain upon the roof, the shriek of a stormy wind, and the rolling of distant surge. She saw and heard them over and over like the sudden changes of tone in some grand dirge—the light and wind, the rain and light, each in turn. The half hour struck. The doctor, stopping in the midst of some quick order, stooped once more with his ear at Harriet's heart.

Still Cynthia listened to the swelling of the dirge; still she saw the light within the room, and heard the mourning of the storm without.

The minutes tolling slower and more slowly counted at last an hour. The mute face upon the pillow had not stirred or warmed with the faintest flush. The doctor had been growing graver; he turned away from the bed. Cynthia looked up into his sorrowful eyes.

"Is it too late?" in a low, unvarying voice.

"With God it is never too late," he answered, solemnly. "*I* can do nothing more."

Then Cynthia kneeled down and hid her face upon the bed.

Peals of thunder reverberating like ten thousand tides upon a world of rock-bound coast, growing fainter, and lost at last in a low and distant growl. The dash of waves that touched the heavens, falling and smoothing to the far-off ripple of some restless sea. The fury of an eternal storm held at length, and calmed like the sobbing of a weary child. The world by some gigantic machine pumped void of air—a gasping and struggling toward the brazen sky. The torments of a rack and the binding of iron chains. The scorching of a tropic sun upon leagues of desert sands. The blackness of a mighty void, and the sense of walking blindfold through it.

A gleam of light at length; a grateful warmth like the winds of summer; the touch of something like the clinging of softest velvet; a pleasant murmur like the lull of many fountains; a sense of rest as the soothing of a mother's lullaby. The flash of broader light and bright coloring; the trailing of a green vine upon a window; the crackling of a fire in a warm and home-like room. The picture of a pale face, with anguished eyes and sad, gray hair, that moved about the room, that came to the bed, that bent over it with a low cry, dropping hot tears.

And Harriet knew that God had given her back her life.

"Cynthia!"

"Harriet! Oh, my sister!"

And Cynthia gathered her in her arms, and broke into the sobbing of a little child.

Harriet smiled faintly, and closing her eyes lay back upon the pillow as if quite content. The hours wore away while she lay there, still too weak for speech, but gaining strength with every moment. Cynthia sat beside her, her eyes upon the pallid face, clasping the clinging hand in both her own. The warm light that brightened and glowed in the room lent strange beauty to the faces of the two, each so old with the weight of lonely years, each white as the Death that had so nearly sundered them, each so still with the hush of thoughts that could not be spoken.

The doctor seeing them so had turned away his face, his kind eyes wet. Little Jane was crying upon the floor.

The Old Year met its death at last quite peacefully The storm had ceased and hushed upon the sea; the wind, weary with its crying, slept at last; the quiet waves that wet the beach caught the light of a faint new moon which rested like a crown upon the hills, and far above and beyond them both the sky was marshaled with its brightest stars.

Cynthia, standing for a moment at the window to fold her hands upon her breast and turn her eyes up to them, heard the clock of a little church that stood near to the sea strike the hour of midnight. So did Harriet, and she raised

her head to listen. When the last stroke died away she called her sister feebly.

Cynthia sent them all away and closed the door. Then she came up and lay down by Harriet's side, and put her arm about her neck. She used to do this when they were girls together. It was many years since then.

"Cynthia, I want to tell you—" But Cynthia stopped her with a long, long kiss.

"It is *I*, Harriet."

"No; you have borne so much, and I—I let you suffer all alone."

"And you?"

Harriet looked up, her face quivering.

"No matter, I was all wrong, Cynthia. If you will only help me a little—"

Cynthia took her younger sister in her arms, and laid her head upon her shoulder, caressing the wet hair.

"Harriet, did you try to go away from me to-night?"

"No, thank God!"

"It is I who should thank Him," said Cynthia, solemnly; "look into my eyes, Harriet."

And Harriet looked through her tears. What she saw there made her hide her face upon her sister's arm and cling to her neck. Cynthia laid her cheek to hers and kissed her.

"We've nothing left but each other," she said.

After a while she laid Harriet back upon the pillow, and rose to put the room in order for the night, her face as quiet as yesterday, no sign in the grave way she went about her work that any thing had occurred to break upon the silence of her daily life—her voice only telling the promise of the New Year.